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The sociology of market work

economic sociology_the european electronic newsletter

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Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne

Suggested Citation: Cochoy, Franck; Dubuisson-Quellier, Sophie (2013) : The sociology of market work, economic sociology_the european electronic newsletter, ISSN 1871-3351, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne, Vol. 15, Iss. 1, pp. 4-11

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/156021

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The Sociology of Market Work

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The attention paid by economic sociology to activities aimed at controlling the market reminds us that the social aspects of the economy include not only market organizations and institutions, but also some activities that are focused on economic exchanges more directly. We propose the notion of "market professionals" to account for the people (recruitment experts, consumer activists, distributors, etc.), the occupations (marketing, design, packaging, etc.) and devices (press, consumer guides, standards, etc.) whose task is "to *work on the market*", i.e. to construct it, move it, organize it, manage and control it – in short, "agencing" transactions (Çalışkan and Callon, 2010; Cochoy, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010).

Drawing on the arguments developed in the special issue of the French journal Sociologie du travail we published in 2000, we would like to demonstrate to sociologists of labor that they should consider the market as one of their objects, but also to economic sociologists that the sociology of labor includes a relevant body of work to account for market activities. A wide variety of markets have been studied in this perspective, from traditional ones like food and wine markets (Barrey et al., 2000; Chauvin, 2010), the financial markets (MacKenzie and Millo, 2003; Zuckerman, 2004), and credit markets (Poon, 2009; Lazarus, 2009; Vargha, 2011), to more surprising ones like the market of death (Trompette and Boissin, 2000), the fair trade market (Neyland and Simakova, 2010), the market for arts (François, 2005 ; Velthuis, 2006), and the market for organs (Heally, 2006; Steiner, 2010); from markets for good and services (Reverdy, 2010; Kjellberg, 2010), to the labor market where recruiters shape the process of matching job supply and demand (Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal, 2000), to the market of prescription such as buying guides (Karpik, 2000), consumer press (Mallard, 2000), and so on. Far from resting on a unique research tradition, these studies combined the insights of researchers from the sociology of professions, anthropology, economics, the sociology of labor and organizations, economic sociology, and the sociology of innovation. If this diversity of fields and views illustrates the ubiquity, variety and breadth of the commercial sphere, by contrast, it also reinforces the paradoxical convergence of these studies: all of them contribute to highlighting the growing influence of market practices on a diversity of fields and the empirical, theoretical and political need for a sociology of market work.

In this paper we further develop the various arguments proposed in the introduction paper of the special issue mentioned above, to support this call for a sociology of market work. The first argument focuses on the practical dimensions of an activity that takes many forms and that produces a large number of material devices involved in the shaping of market exchanges. The second argument highlights the effects of such mediations on market operations themselves by emphasizing the political dimension of these effects. The third argument addresses the forms of rationalization involved in these different forms of market work. Finally, the fourth argument invites us to consider this market work as part of a related market where professionals and knowledge compete each other to gain access to the consumer and to be acknowledged as a legitimate market representation.

A group of professionals who take (and should lead us to take) market seriously

Since the functioning of the commercial relationship is based on the commitment of a large number of players who work or who are employed to manage it, its full understanding requires a sociological inquiry focused on market professionals and market work. Such a sociology can show that these actors and/or their employers, far from considering the market as a fictitious entity, instead take it seriously: more than economists and more than sociologists, market participants consider their action field as an open, uncertain and remote space, i.e. as an area that requires a constant, gentle, patient and very fragile work aimed at approaching and shaping economic exchanges. This work can be scrutinized from the view of the sociology of work and activity. We should therefore not think that networks, shared knowledge and organizations (Dobbin, 2004) are the only mechanisms that, beyond prices, contribute to adjust the "matching" between sup-

ply and demand. These proposals laid the foundations for the establishment of a French stream of economic sociology that sought to account for market mediation activities.

This approach has led to numerous studies focused on the actors who play the role of market intermediaries, such as advertisers, designers, and critics, but also to work on many market devices, like product labels, advertisements, consumer reports or consumer guides. For example, Lucien Karpik's study dedicated to the famous Michelin guide (Karpik, 2000) shows how the guide designers worked at "removing the unexpected in the discovery of the unknown." They did so by not mobilizing word-of-mouth, but by instead constructing a true "trust device" intended to promote a kind of advice that is both more credible and less personal. The guide, by means of a prodigious effort of inventory, classification, assessment and comparison of the technical, touristic and gastronomic resources of France indeed replaced the immediate, idiosyncratic judgments used in social networks by a more analytical and generalized judgment. The main effect of this type of judgment is to link the valuation of market goods and services not to the observation of their prices, but to the standardized assessment of their qualities. The development of this type of "professional equipment" of economic cognition draws our attention to the importance of indirect relationships which are inherent to the commodity relation, and to the prominent role of "intermediary objects," artifacts and technical devices, which are now known to be more and more involved in market shaping activities (Callon et al., 2007).

But such material intermediation is not limited to the market of goods; it is also involved in some specific activities of the labor market. François Eymard-Duvernay and Emmanuelle Marchal show that the share of the labor market based on the mobilization of personal networks is not, as Granovetter suggests, the only one that deserves the attention of the social sciences (Granovetter, 1983). Sociologists should also focus on the remaining share, which is often believed to rest on pure market mechanisms (Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal, 2000). The authors take as their starting point the job ads and "psychotechnical tests" that govern hiring procedures, that is to say, situations where people come to "sell themselves" without relying on any previous social relationship. Studying the work of recruiters reveals matching processes between supply and demand which, far from relying on disembodied market mechanisms, rather mobilize a very important form of work aimed at translating, adapting and converting both employers' expectations and job applicants' trajectories. Market work is unique in that it engages the social sciences in settling the agreement between supply and demand along a performative scheme (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie and al., 2007). The processes of writing classified ads and developing standardized tests convey not only the psychological representation of an individual with his or her skills and personal qualities, according to the liberal vision of the *homo economicus*, but they themselves contribute to enacting this vision. Indeed, these operations attempt to break the ties that bind individual performance to collective background; they try to convert the localized and shared-experience character of the previous job(s) of the candidate into a series of purely personal qualities and skills. This performative use of social sciences in order to value candidates on the labor market does not exempt sociology from a reflection on its own contribution to the processes involved. The authors therefore call for a more sociological approach to the market work. This would have the advantage of not blaming on individuals inefficiencies whose origins stem rather from organizational backgrounds, and which are related to the types of cognitive intermediation involved in market adjustments as well as to the way recruitment professionals mobilize them, making it necessary to consider the political dimension of this intermediation in the analysis.

What the work of professionals does (or would like to do) to the market; or the ambiguities of a "second rationalization"

Most research on market intermediation converges in stressing the same key fact: the main task of market shaping, framing, or "agencing" (Araujo and al., 2010) is often to define market goods, to qualify them, to build classifications and criteria according to which they may be ranked and valued (Mallard, 2000; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010, 2013a). For instance, product packaging, tourist guides, psychometric tests or consumer reports are all implementing a "criterialization activity." This activity is aimed at defining the different dimensions of product quality, selecting which aspects deserve to be rated, highlighting what personal attributes and skills are required for a job, or describing the features of objects upon which consumer choices should be based. In this vein, Michel Callon and his colleagues (Callon, 1998; Callon et al. 2007) drew our attention on the importance of market devices (computational tools, science and technology management, econometric models…) that equip economic cognition in order

to make the existence of empirical calculating agents possible. But it should be considered that such computational work aimed at designing "accounting" equipment for economic cognition is paralleled by a symmetrical and complementary literary work aimed at producing the exact definition of what should be counted and valued. Indeed, the price given to an economic entity has no real meaning without a proper definition of what is priced. It is necessary to qualify the products, to identify the dimensions along which a value can be assigned to them. But unlike pricing activities, which can at least partially rely on market adjustments, the definition of quality is necessarily based on voluntary, formalized, and professionalized activities that economic sociology can potentially analyze better than economics, given its close attention to specific cases, market dynamics and qualitative aspects. Conversely, the literary work of market professionals is more and more involved in the economic game, either through establishing "qualitative barriers to entry" (e.g. when recruiters multiply the criteria for being "eligible" at a particular position), by substituting requirements focused on the nature of the services for those based on the price dimension (as gourmet, wine or film guides do), or by opening a discussion about the relevant judgment criteria (as social forces like consumerism and environmental movements are able to do (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013b)). More precisely, the literary work (qualification) and the computational work (calculation), far from being opposed, rather support each other and combine into "qualculation activities." By "qualculation" we mean a kind of operation which consists of ceaselessly defining and re-defining the various economic orders of worth along which economic goods and services are valuated (Cochoy 2004; Cochoy, 2008a; Stark, 2009). Given the importance of such operations, it is clear that the challenge is to focus on these professionals, to conduct an anthropological study of them and their work, and to reflect on the social and economic impacts of their activities.

The effects of these intermediaries are numerous and significant. For example, the Michelin Company managed to redefine both supply and demand in the transport and tourism markets. To do so, it succeeded in convincing the hospitality industry (secteur hôtelier) to enrich and diversify its services. The guide encouraged travelers to embrace the successive identities of the motorist, the tourist and the gourmet. Among all these possible effects, those that affect consumers deserve special attention, since they lead to the extension of the professional vision of the market to lay public, and thereby necessitate our consideration of the consequences of such an extension. In this respect, the study of the various devices aimed at channeling consumers' choices is of prominent importance (Karpik, 2011). A good example is that of consumer press, which worked to "professionalize" the consumer's judgment itself (Mallard, 2000). We may also mention the many contemporary devices that allow consumers to create and use huge datasets of consumer reviews (Beauvisage et al., 2012) or alternative guides provided by activists to empower consumers for their purchases (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013b). Each of these devices and each related form of market work is intended to link purchasing decisions to a form of valuation. Such valuation procedures are developed *ex ante* by engineers, lawyers and journalists in the case of consumer press; by Internet users in the case of consumer forums; or by activists in the case of alternative guides. Can we then consider that each of these valuation programs fits into an implicit project of rationalization? For instance, does the rationalization of consumer associations seek to accomplish for consumption and for the supposed consumer's best interest what Taylor once tried to do for production and at the expense of the worker?

These multiple rationalizations can be traced in the efforts made to remove from the consumer's mind the standpoint of the naive dreamer seduced by any commercial impulse, in order to replace it, not with the rational examination of choice alternatives (prized by the theoretical model of the market), but with other forms of valuation: functional valuation (prized by industrial engineers), valuation according to fame (prized by consumer review systems) or axiological evaluation (prized by social movements such as fair trade movement or environmental movement). This multiple rationalization of the consumer seems to fuel a "disenchantment of things" which extends the Weberian disenchantment of the world. Or rather, it seems to give a second chance (on the market side) to a logic that has long met its limits on the production side. It is important to note the curious gap that is emerging between the recent rationalization project of consumerism and post-Taylorist practices and the diversification of industrial products and of the consumer who face them. These contradictory movements have contradictory effects: on the one hand, they result in a relative increase of consumer behavior inspired by consumerist advice; on the other, they entice a certain evolution of expert valuation practices. Indeed, these practices tend to combine the rational assessment of products with the acceptance of a diversity of tastes and consumption behavior. The professional equipment of choice eventually abandons the setting of an illusory "one best choice" in favor of a customized advice based on the

various possible contexts of use or on consumers' diverse axiological orientations. More generally, consumers oscillate constantly between multiple and sometimes contradictory requirements (Barrey et al, 2000). The relative resistance of the consumer to her rationalization and the correlative easing of expert prescribing practices and devices do not only rely on the diversity of uses (on the demand side) and on the diversification of production (on the supply side). They are also inseparable from the very plurality of mediators that intervene between the two and who evidence, beyond each one of them, the intervention of a genuine market of professionals. However, the observable rationalization is partial and transient, or rather it appears through paradoxical forms, which strive to develop systematic and controlled knowledge for the activation of non-rational relationships to market situations. This is demonstrated, for example, in the development of devices that play on motives other than calculation, such as emotions, senses, or even curiosity (Cochoy, 2012).

The market of the professional, or how the relationship between market professionals impact exchange patterns

It is therefore important not only to study the activities of market intermediaries, but also to account for the plurality of market mediation devices. We then quickly notice the existence of a plurality of market prescribers that leads these market professionals to compete. Such competition in turn bends the configuration of exchange, in several respects.

First, the existence of a plurality of prescribers helps to displace the management of choices beyond the products at stake: the task is no longer that of knowing (or showing) which product to choose, or that of deciding whether to choose alone or with a guide, but that of which guide to choose. This shift from choice "guidance" to the choice of guides stems directly from the guides themselves, as they feel the need to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This differentiation concern is pervasive in the history of the Michelin guide since its first edition in 1901 (which claims that "we cannot find this information in any guide") to its recurring confrontation with other food guides. Choosing a product cannot be separated from the operation of choosing a market intermediary, and market work is just as much to attract customers to a product as to try to optimize the market performance of a prescribing device.

The competition for the best "ready-to-choose" system also contributes to transforming consumer cognition. On the one hand, consumer cognition is transformed by legitimizing the importance of an analytical view of the products based on assessment criteria. On the other hand, it is changed by realizing that these criteria are in no way natural or innocent. Several market professionals work to preselect a range of products that can then be chosen by the end user, as well as the criteria for choosing them. If the consumer can choose between different products from a retailer, it is also because a professional buyer has previously referenced products of a particular manufacturer. Thus, the work of selecting goods which develops throughout marketing channels is based on a series of devices aimed at equipping market professionals themselves. This opens an exciting research avenue for the study of the "market of marketing devices." On such a market, the more manipulated actors are not necessarily the ones we might think: professionals sell consumer manipulation devices to other professionals on the argument of their manipulative power, but in such process the first manipulated actor is the one who buys the allegedly manipulative devices, the effectiveness of which is not guaranteed (Cochoy, 2008b).

It should be noted that these market professionals and types of market work overlap, compete and coexist in a plurality of ways. They are distributed in different areas of market expertise and they may compete with each other, depending on the moment when they intervene to prescribe economic actors' choices (Barrey et al., 2000). The designer shapes the contours of the object; the packager values it through packaging; the merchandiser displays it in the competitive space of the retail outlet. The provision of self-service products, that is to say, the framing of choices without human mediation, is possible only by means of a variety of activities aimed at enabling the objective products and the cognitive abilities of consumers (Grandclément, 2008). Control of the commercial scene depends on a sequential articulation between market professionals (the involved professionals intervene the one after the other) and a remote coordination of the same experts (the professionals coordinate from a distance and through market objects or through the market scene itself). This double necessity heavily influences both consumer choices and the relationships between market professionals. If the sequential order of professional interventions allows some adjustment between market mediators, since the next one to intervene can always adapt his work to the work of the previous one, the succession and the distance of the interventions provide an

additional power to the one who is the last to intervene – the seller. By controlling the last staging of products the vendor acquires the power to magnify or diminish the efforts of those who preceded him. But the distance and time lag between the successive actions is also a source of noise, leaks, and misunderstandings. These many contingencies relativize the individual and collective influence of market professionals. Moreover, because they are anxious to overcome the fundamental uncertainty of the market environment, market professionals are likely to base their decisions on market information feedback such as sales accounting and panel analysis, leading to raise the question of who is manipulating whom on the market.

Market professionals can also compete based on their ability to assert the legitimacy and the effectiveness of their knowledge about consumption and markets. In this respect, packagers, designers, merchandisers (and many others: advertisers, standardizers, web managers, big data analysts, etc.) are all trying to show that they know how to produce their particular market adjustment in the most efficient way, even if their options are not necessarily compatible others at different points in the process. All the different market devices they produce act as delegates of the supply side, which can be alternately used by consumers for their own purposes. From this point of view, the degree of institutionalization of market knowledge and professions is an interesting research topic. If some bodies of knowledge, like marketing (Cochoy, 1998), succeed in appearing to be both academic disciplines and operational know-how internalized in companies, others are still struggling for their institutionalization; for instance, design has attempted to become an academic discipline but still remains largely outsourced by firms (Dubuisson and Hennion, 1995).

Furthermore, market professionals work increasingly in sectors that were a priori resistant to commercialization and professionalization, which Philippe Steiner proposes to call "contested markets" (Steiner and Trespeuch, 2013) but which nevertheless succumb, as the case of funeral services shows beautifully (Trompette and Boissin, 2000, Trompette 2011). If death's resistance to commodification is expressed in the players' discretion in terms of pricing and advertising strategies, its surrender to the forces of market relations can be seen elsewhere, in the work of the professionals of death who gradually adopt marketing, organizational, and business tools. The permeability of the funeral industry to market dynamics paradoxically makes this market a laboratory where it is possible to isolate and thus better understand the professional expertise and the qualitative skills that are involved anywhere else in the social functioning of markets. The work of Pascale Trompette even suggests how the requirement for erasing this "market work" from the consumption of funeral goods and services has succeeded in depriving consumers from the very possibility of choice. Through various technical and organizational tricks, funeral companies manage to produce a channeling of demand by seizing it directly in the places where it is expressed (in the town hall when people were dying at home, and now in hospitals where our lives most often end) (Trompette, 2007).

Finally, it seems important to consider that market professionals are also subject to external competition, for instance when players from the activist world or civil society, or from other professional groups, also try to prescribe their consumption choices to consumers. This is what consumer groups do, or social movement organizations which fight against consumer debt, for environmental protection, for promoting economic equity and social justice, or for better health practices: they encourage consumers to buy specific products and boycott others. Similarly, consumers may also gather to form collectives that are able to operate evaluating mechanisms, as evidenced by the websites designed to assess and rate the products or services. In this way, Social Movement Organizations are not only part of a social context of culture building, but in some cases function as real market actors, and contribute to the creation of new identities that may generate economic activities either unwittingly, as in the case of the development of the soft drink industry by the temperance movement (Hiatt et al., 2009), or deliberately, as in the cases of independent booksellers (Miller, 2006), windmill entrepreneurs (Sine & Lee, 2009), nouvelle cuisine chefs (Rao et al., 2003), grass-fed meat producers (Weber, Heinze and DeSoucey, 2008), recycling organizations (Lounsbury et al, 2003) and alternative food movements (Dubuisson-Quellier, Lamine & LeVelly, 2011). In the context of organization theory, some research has also highlighted the ability of social movements to legitimize or de-legitimize business choices and practices, as in the case of the cooperative firm (Schneiberg, 2002, 2007; Schneiberg, King and Smith, 2008) or the organizational forms of production of specialty beers (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). Another strategy implemented by social movements consists in the direct dissemination, in markets, of specific market devices aimed at equipping consumers to make choices. Through these tactics, SMOs seek to shape consumers' perceptions of products and to modify their preferences and valuation

categories, thereby creating strong incentives for companies to adapt to these new consumers' expectations (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013b).

In this paper, we have presented a number of proposals that were first formulated in our introduction to the March 2000 special issue Sociologie du travail. Our objective was to open a field of research on the analysis of market work, and encourage labor and economic sociologists to consider the work of market mediators, including both market devices and market professionals. Currently many studies are working on this approach, in France and elsewhere. It has become clear that research on marketization processes cannot fail to pay attention to the underlying professions and devices. In this view, the economic realm appears as a highly social space, not only because it is populated by networks and institutions that produce or stabilize economic exchanges, as envisaged in the American "new economic sociology," but also (and this is one of the contributions of the French economic sociology) because they are social activities that forge it. These activities are produced by professionals who also produce market devices of various types which deserve to be further explored. Such perspectives open a whole field aimed at exploring and understanding economic exchange mechanisms, and especially the processes of market "agencing" (Çalişkan & Callon, 2010).

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